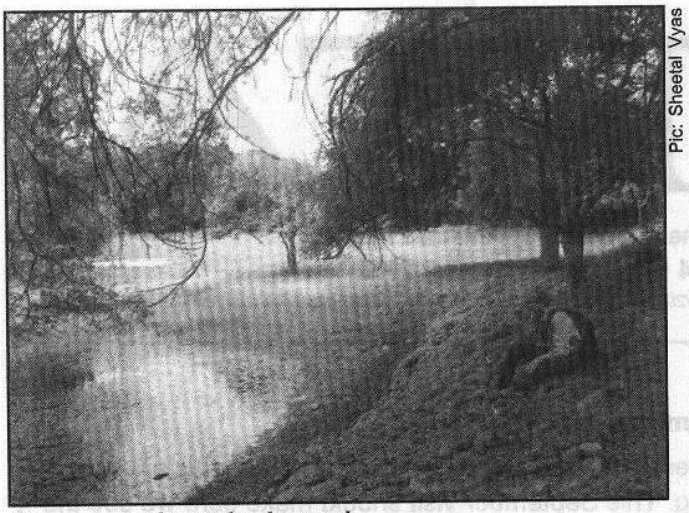


Pic: Sheetal Vyas

Humayun meditates by the pond.

A Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) and a few Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) flew overhead, and prinias Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) and Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*) flitted around the area. As we moved on, we saw a Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus)* sitting atop a tree, and out came the cameras again. A few branches below it was a Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala)* and a White-headed Babbler (*Turdoides affinis*). Soon after, we ticked off the Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*) and Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*). As we trudged along to the *machaan*, we heard the Brainfever Bird (*Hierococcyx varius*), and Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*). Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) also ensured that they did not go unheard or unseen.

The *machaan* provided us with a lovely view of the green canopy and the surrounding areas. Golconda stood proudly in the distance. There is a lot of ongoing construction around the place, and we could see the Outer Ring Road being built. By next year, we will certainly see the Chilkur Reserve Forest area affected by this development.

Among other highlights of the trip were the feathers (mostly peacock) and porcupine quills we gathered, and a close look we got at a Praying Mantis. Umesh Mani also managed to get 'lost'. Oddly enough, the search party sent to find him managed to get lost as well. Finally, they found the guide, or rather vice versa, and we were all reunited.

After a good breakfast, we left the *machaan* and made our way back to the gate, where we saw a Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae)* that showed off its fine colours before departing. After cups of tea, provided kindly by Aasheesh, we left the park. I am already looking forward to my next birding trip.

Clippings

Courser's habitat under threat again

This article appeared in The Hindu, *19 August 2007*

M Sai Gopal

Hyderabad: The last known habitat of the critically endangered and enigmatic bird of Andhra Pradesh – Jerdon's Courser (*Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*) – could once again come under threat. The bird is not found anywhere else in the world.

The Irrigation Department's latest realignment plans of the Telugu Ganga Canal project, has the potential to wipe away 89 hectares of shrub jungle, typical habitat of the bird, near the sites where the bird was spotted in the recent years at Sri Lankamalleswara Sanctuary, Kadapa, a recent report from Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) says.

The proposed realignment plans for the canal, if implemented, would cut across the scrub jungle habitat, says the report. "The realignment is precariously close to the boundary of the Sri Lankamalleswara Sanctuary, Kadapa, as well as the sites where the Courser's presence was recorded regularly between 2000-06," the report says.

The report goes on to add that "canal alignment has to be shifted so that it would border the scrub jungle habitat without actually changing the length of the canal, which is 2.2 km. The canal alignment may be shifted so that the only place of this bird can be saved for posterity."

"The new alignment being pushed by the Irrigation Department, during the course of our negotiations, would further risk the habitat of the Courser. We have already given an alternative proposal of alignment and we feel that our proposal would protect the bird's habitat. If the

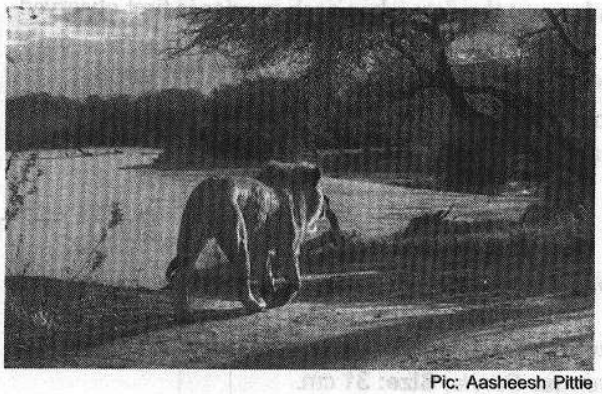
matter is not solved, then we will have to submit our report directly to Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of Supreme Court," S Ashok Kumar, who is holding talks with the Irrigation Department on behalf of the BNHS in Andhra Pradesh, told *The Hindu*.

Thanks to the intervention of the CEC earlier this year, the Department had agreed to re-route the canal, to protect the last known habitat of this bird, the numbers of which hover between 20 and 80. The CEC had directed the stakeholders, including the BNHS, wildlife officials and the Irrigation Department, to chalk out a 'via media' to save the bird and its habitat.

"It is sad that we have to fight so much to conserve this rare bird which should be considered the 'Pride of Andhra Pradesh'. However, I am sure, if all the stakeholders sit together once again to discuss, we can save this beautiful bird," says BNHS researcher P Jeganathan.

Indoor Meeting: Report

By Sheetal Vyas



Pic: Aasheesh Pittie

Africa was the focus of this month's indoor meeting at the Association of German Culture on 18 August. Aasheesh Pittie and young Pratik Gupte had both had the good fortune to recently visit that Mecca of wildlife, Kenya. Their accounts and their pictures made for a very interesting and instructive evening. Kenya has over 1000 bird species and the open African landscape is breathtaking even when constrained by camera lens. The talk, accompanied by a visual presentation, gave us a fascinating glimpse into the wildlife in the parks of Masai Mara, Nakuru and Samburu. Aasheesh laced his narrative with doses of humour as he shared his experiences and his photographs were no less effective for having been captured with an aim-and-shoot camera. Prateek's pictures were also excellent.

It was a well rounded lecture: Aasheesh began with practical details of flights and vaccinations you need to visit Kenya and took us through his experiences with traffic and almost-missed connecting flights. Tourism in Kenya, we were happy to learn, supports a wide range of budgets, from shoestring to luxury. A couple of map-slides put the geography in context, a brief description of the weather and culture filled in the colour and the safari began in earnest. Lions, giraffes, leopards with kill, zebras, a trio of cheetahs, oryx and wildebeest were interspersed with African birds of the most vivid hues, including a pink sea of over a million flamingos at Lake Nakuru. The wildlife-supporting lakes in Kenya occur in the Rift Valley, a geological fissure that is about 6000 km long and around 60 km wide. One of the longest rifts in the world, this cuts a swathe through Eastern Africa, starting in Lebanon, running through Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Congo, Malawi and ending in Mozambique.

Even more astounding than the variety of wildlife was the fact that these animals were not in the slightest bit shy. To us in India, who're used to stalking birds and game with the stealthiest of treads, and then being content with fleeting glimpses, it was a revelation to know that birds and animals allowed themselves to be approached and photographed from distances of a few feet.

At the end, the speakers took a few questions and that rounded off a happy evening of armchair travel.